

The Great Controversy

The Triumph of God's Love

Lesson #13 for June 29, 2024

Scriptures: Revelation 20:11-15; 21:2-4; 22:11-12; Jeremiah 25:33; 30:5-7; Psalm 91:1-11.

1. When will God's love triumph?

[From the Bible study guide=BSG:] We can face the future with hope. Although challenging times are coming, whatever suffering we must go through, whatever hardships we must endure, whatever sorrows we experience, if we have hope a better day is coming, we can live life today with purpose and joy. Franklin D. Roosevelt was president during 1933–1945, one of the most difficult periods of U.S. history. He was paralyzed by polio and unable to walk unaided. He once wrote, "We have always held to the hope, the belief, the conviction, that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon." Albert Einstein, one of the world's most brilliant men, wrote, "Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow." Alfred Lord Tennyson, a popular English poet during Queen Victoria's reign, once wrote, "Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering 'It will be happier.'"—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath Afternoon, June 22.‡

[BSG:] This ... lesson wraps up our study, highlighting the final developments in the cosmic war between God and Satan. Among the notable events that transpire during the culmination of the great controversy are: (1) the time of trouble; (2) the second coming of Jesus; (3) the executive judgment in heaven during the millennium, with a synopsis of events both on earth and in heaven at that time; and (4) the restoration of all things for eternity. The Bible promises that the great controversy will end in God's victory. Scripture calls us to trust God, participate with Him in the salvation of as many souls as possible, and share in His past (the Cross), present (individual, church, and salvation), and future (final cosmic) victory.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 171.‡

2. For those who know what is coming and have properly prepared themselves, we can say: "The time of trouble is a great time to be alive!"—Dr. Richard Nies. The time of trouble happens after the close of probation. And the close of probation, as we will see, happens after each person has made up his/her mind as to which side s/he is going to commit.

Revelation 22:11-12: ¹¹ "Whoever is evil must go on doing evil, and whoever is filthy must go on being filthy; whoever is good must go on doing good, and whoever is holy must go on being holy."

¹² "**Listen!**" says Jesus. "**I am coming soon! I will bring my rewards with me, to give to each one according to what he has done.**"—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Revelation 22:11-12). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].‡

3. The Bible, even in the Old Testament, makes it very clear that the faithful will be those whose names God has already written in His book. See Daniel 12:1-2; Jeremiah 30:5-7.
4. Revelation 16 describes the seven last plagues. To the wicked it will be a time of awful, awful

destruction. But, to the faithful it will be a time of God's protection. Their names will have been written in the book of life. (See Philippians 4:3; Revelation 13:8; Revelation 20:12,15; Revelation 22:19.) Jesus Himself gave us numerous promises that He would be with us and that He is preparing a place for us in heaven.

1 John 3:1-3: ¹ See how much the Father has loved us! His love is so great that we are called God's children — and so, in fact, we are. This is why the world does not know us: it has not known God. ²My dear friends, we are now God's children, but it is not yet clear what we shall become. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is. ³Everyone who has this hope in Christ keeps himself pure, just as Christ is pure.—*Good News Bible*.*

[BSG:] In the time of trouble, God's people have a personal relationship with Jesus so deep that nothing can change it. Their consummate desire is to please Him in all things so that, through the work of the Holy Spirit, they will be as pure as He is pure. There was nothing in Christ's heart that responded to Satan's deceptions. We can reflect this aspect of His character, as well.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, June 23.‡

5. There are numerous passages in Scripture which tell us that Jesus will always be with us if we remain faithful to Him. See Psalm 27:5; Psalm 91:1-11; and Revelation 3:10-12.

[BSG:] There are some who have misunderstood the concept of living through the time of trouble without a mediator. **Jesus ceases His mediation in heaven's sanctuary when everyone has made their final decision for or against Him.** But this does not mean we are alone during this time, trusting our own strength. Jesus has assured us He will be with us always (*Matt. 28:20*). Faith trusts when it cannot see and believes even when the world around us is falling apart. During the time of trouble, our faith strengthens and our longing for eternity increases so that our one desire is to live forever with Jesus.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, June 23.†§

6. One word stands out as being absolutely essential for God's faithful people during the time of trouble; that word is *hope*! We have God's promises, and we need to maintain our hope in Him. And what happens to those people who do not have hope? Look at the contrast between those who have hope and those who do not.

Revelation 6:15-17: ¹⁵Then the kings of the earth, the rulers and the military chiefs, the rich and the powerful, and all other people, slave and free, hid themselves in caves and under rocks on the mountains. ¹⁶They called out to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the eyes of the one who sits on the throne and from the anger of the Lamb! ¹⁷The terrible day of their anger is here, and who can stand against it?"—*Good News Bible*.*

Isaiah 25:8-9: ⁸The Sovereign LORD will destroy death for ever [*sic-Br*]! He will wipe away the tears from everyone's eyes and take away the disgrace his people have suffered throughout the world. The LORD himself has spoken!

⁹ When it happens, everyone will say, "He is our God! We have put our trust in him, and he has rescued us. He is the LORD! We have put our trust in him, and now we are happy and joyful because he has saved us."—*Good News Bible*.*‡

7. To the righteous, the second coming of Jesus will be a time to celebrate the wedding feast

of the Lamb. They will be singing praises to God. See Revelation 15:3-4.

[From the writings of Ellen G. White=EGW:] **The cross of Christ will be the science and the song of the redeemed through all eternity.** In Christ glorified they will behold Christ crucified.... That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 651.2.†‡

[EGW:] **The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.** Our only hope is perfect trust in the blood of Him who can save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. **The death of Christ on the cross of Calvary is our only hope in this world, and it will be our theme in the world to come.**—Ellen G. White, *SDA Bible Commentary*,* vol.5, 1132.9.†‡

8. Revelation 13, portraying Satan's side in the great controversy, seems to suggest that the whole world will wander after him, even worship him! God's response, as recorded in Revelation 14, will lead to the close of probation and the plagues described in Revelation 16.
9. ***Is the world becoming more loving—following God's example—or more selfish and self-centered—following Satan's example?***
10. And then the end will come.

Revelation 19:11-16: ¹¹ Then I saw heaven open, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True; it is with justice that he judges and fights his battles. ¹²His eyes were like a flame of fire, and he wore many crowns on his head. He had a name written on him, but no one except himself knows what it is. ¹³The robe he wore was covered with blood. His name is "The Word of God". [sic] ¹⁴The armies of heaven followed him, riding on white horses and dressed in clean white linen. ¹⁵Out of his mouth came a sharp sword, with which he will defeat the nations. He will rule over them with a rod of iron, and he will trample out the wine in the winepress of the furious anger of the Almighty God. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh was written the name: "King of kings and Lord of lords". [sic]—*Good News Bible*.*‡

Revelation 20:1-3: ¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the abyss and a heavy chain. ²He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent — that is, the Devil, or Satan — and chained him up for a thousand years. ³The angel threw him into the abyss, locked it, and sealed it, so that he could not deceive the nations any more until the thousand years were over. After that he must be let loose for a little while.—*Good News Bible*.*

11. ***If you do not have an understanding of the great controversy and the accusations and challenges that the Devil has leveled against God, then Revelation 20:1-3,7 are impossible to understand! Even scholars are completely puzzled.***

[BSG:] The imagery in Revelation 20:1–3 is symbolic. **Satan is not literally bound with a chain and locked in a pit. For 1,000 years, he is confined to this desolate, depopulated earth, bound by the circumstances he himself has created.** In 2 Peter 2:4, we read that Satan and his angels were reserved for punishment by "chains of darkness." **Satan will be confined to the earth**

by a chain of circumstances, with no one to tempt. For 1,000 years, he will see the devastation, destruction, and disaster that his rebellion has created.

The Greek word translated “bottomless pit” is the same word from which we get our English word “abyss.” It also is the same word used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to describe the earth at Creation. “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep” (*Gen. 1:2, NKJV*). In the Septuagint, the word “deep” here is the Greek word *abyssos*, “abyss.” It describes a desolate earth. The “bottomless pit” is not some subterranean cavern or some yawning chasm somewhere out there in the universe. **Satan’s work of sin and destruction, along with the tremendous chaos preceding the Second Coming, has brought the earth back to a dark, disorganized mass like its condition at the beginning of Creation.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, June 25.^{†‡§}

Genesis 1:2: The earth was **formless and desolate** [*abyssos*]. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the Spirit of God was moving over the water.—*Good News Bible.*^{*†‡}

Jeremiah 4:23-26: ²³ I looked at the earth — it was a barren waste;
at the sky — there was no light.

²⁴ I looked at the mountains — they were shaking,
and the hills were rocking to and fro.

²⁵ I saw that there were no people;
even the birds had flown away.

²⁶ The fertile land had become a desert;
its cities were in ruins
because of the LORD’s fierce anger.—*Good News Bible.*^{*}

Jeremiah 25:33: On that day the bodies of those whom the LORD has killed will lie scattered from one end of the earth to the other. No one will mourn for them, and they will not be taken away and buried. They will lie on the ground like piles of manure.—*Good News Bible.*^{*}

12. **That will be the end of all of those who persistently refuse God’s plan for their lives.**

[BSG:] The prophet here emphasizes the catastrophic destruction at the second coming of Christ and that no person is left alive on earth during this thousand-year period. Satan and his evil angels are left to contemplate the havoc caused by his rebellion. The entire universe recognizes anew that the wages of sin is death. [Romans 6:23] God deals with the sin problem so that it will never rise again (*Nah. 1:9*). There are three prime ways God does this. **First**, He reveals His limitless love, passionate desire, and relentless efforts to save all humanity. **Second**, He reveals His justice, fairness, and righteousness. **Third**, He allows the universe to see the ultimate results of sin and rebellion.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, June 25.^{†‡§}

Nahum 1:9: What are you plotting against the LORD?

He will destroy you.

No one opposes him more than once.—*Good News Bible.*^{*}

13. **Just after the second coming, the millennium will start.**

Revelation 20:4-6: ⁴ Then I saw thrones, and those who sat on them were given the power to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been executed because they had proclaimed the truth that Jesus revealed and the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or its image, nor had they received the mark of the beast on their foreheads or their hands. **They came to life and ruled as kings with Christ for a thousand years.** ⁵(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were over.) This is the first raising of the dead. ⁶Happy and greatly blessed are those who are included in this first raising of the dead. The second death has no power over them; they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they will rule with him for a thousand years.—*Good News Bible*.*†

[BSG:] During the millennium, the righteous will have an opportunity to observe firsthand God's justice and love in how He has dealt with the sin problem. Who doesn't have questions they would like to ask God about a lot of things? Now, during the millennium in heaven, the redeemed get to ask those questions. If a loved one or close friend is absent from heaven, the saved have the opportunity to understand God's decisions more fully. **In a new way, more forcefully than ever before, the redeemed will grasp God's powerful attempts to save every person who has ever lived. They will realize anew that everyone who is lost has missed out on heaven because of their own personal rejection of Christ.** Only then does God bring final judgment—the second death, which is eternal destruction—on the lost.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, June 26.††

2 Corinthians 5:10: For all of us must appear before Christ, to be judged by him. We will each receive what we deserve, **according to everything we have done**, good or bad, in our bodily life.—*Good News Bible*.*†

Romans 14:10-12: ¹⁰You then, who eat only vegetables — why do you pass judgement on others? And you who eat anything — why do you despise other believers? All of us will stand before God to be judged by him. ¹¹For the scripture says:

**“As surely as I am the living God, says the Lord,
everyone will kneel before me,
and everyone will confess that I am God.”**

¹²**Every one of us, then, will have to give an account of ourselves to God.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

Revelation 20:11-15: ¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sits on it. Earth and heaven fled from his presence and were seen no more. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small alike, standing before the throne. Books were opened, and then another book was opened, the book of the living. **The dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books.** ¹³Then the sea gave up its dead. Death and the world of the dead also gave up the dead they held. And **all were judged according to what they had done.** ¹⁴Then death and the world of the dead were thrown into the lake of fire. (This lake of fire is the second death.) ¹⁵Whoever did not have their names written in the book of the living were thrown into the lake of fire.—*Good News Bible*.*†

14. Following the 1000 years known as the millennium, what will happen?

[BSG:] **For 1,000 years, Satan has had no one to tempt or deceive.** He and his angels have been alone to reflect on the deadly consequences of sin. [See GC 659.1.] At the end of the millennium, the wicked dead are resurrected to face the judgment and receive their final reward (*Rev. 20:5*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, June 26.^{†‡§}

Revelation 20:5: (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were over.)—*Good News Bible.**

[BSG:] Now Satan has a vast army of followers. Although Satan has suffered defeat after defeat in the great controversy, he is encouraged as he sees the huge throng of the lost. Not yet ready to end his rebellion, he goes out to deceive these “nations.” Satan inspires them to make one last great effort to overthrow God and set up their own kingdom. The term “Gog and Magog” is used to symbolize Satan and the unsaved of all ages. Satan and his followers surround “the camp of the saints and the beloved city” (*Rev. 20:9, NKJV*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, June 26.^{‡§}

Revelation 20:7-9: ⁷ After the thousand years are over, Satan [and his angels] will be let loose from his prison, ⁸and he will go out to deceive the nations scattered over the whole world, that is, Gog and Magog. Satan will bring them all together for battle, as many as the grains of sand on the seashore. ⁹They spread out over the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people and the city that he loves. **But fire came down from heaven and destroyed them.**—*Good News Bible.*†‡*

[BSG:] At the close of the millennium, not only are all the wicked raised to life, but the Holy City, New Jerusalem, descends to earth from heaven (*Rev. 21:2*)! The saints have been living and reigning with Christ in the New Jerusalem for the millennium. Now, **at the end of the 1,000 years, the city descends to earth along with God, Jesus, the angels, and all the redeemed. Everyone is present for the final battle of the great controversy. Sin is about to be eradicated once and for all!**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, June 26.^{†‡§}

Revelation 21:2: And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband.—*Good News Bible.**

15. In the end, every being, even Satan, will acknowledge that God has been fair.

[BSG:] To resolve the sin problem so evil never arises again, everyone must be convinced that God has been fair and just in all His ways. Ultimately, **every knee shall bow and acknowledge God’s justice in the great controversy,** [See *Philippians 2:10-11*.] even Satan and his evil angels, and that there was never any justification for rebellion against God.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, June 27.^{†‡}

16. Let us read what Ellen White had to say on this topic.

[EGW:] **As soon as the books of record are opened, and the eye of Jesus looks upon the wicked, they are conscious of every sin which they have ever committed. They see just where their feet diverged from the path of purity and holiness, just how far pride and rebellion have carried them in**

the violation of the law of God. The seductive temptations which they encouraged by indulgence in sin, the blessings perverted, the messengers of God despised, the warnings rejected, the waves of mercy beaten back by the stubborn, unrepentant heart—all appear as if written in letters of fire....

The whole wicked world stand arraigned at the bar of God on the charge of high treason against the government of heaven. **They have none to plead their cause; they are without excuse;** and the sentence of eternal death is pronounced against them.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 666.2-668.2.†‡

[EGW:] A life of rebellion against God has unfitted them [the wicked] for heaven. **Its purity, holiness, and peace would be torture to them; the glory of God would be a consuming fire. They would long to flee from that holy place. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them. The destiny of the wicked is fixed by their own choice. Their exclusion from heaven is voluntary with themselves, and just and merciful on the part of God.**—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 542.2.†‡

17. **God will not torture anyone, either in heaven or in “hell”!**

Malachi 4:1-2: ¹The LORD Almighty says, “**The day is coming when all proud and evil people will burn like straw. On that day they will burn up, and there will be nothing left of them.**” ²But for you who obey me, my saving power will rise on you like the sun and bring healing like the sun’s rays. You will be as free and happy as calves let out of a stall.”—*Good News Bible*.*†

18. It is important to notice that **it is the memory of the lost that will be eternally destroyed.** There will be no eternal torture.

19. **In the Bible, the terms forever or eternal or everlasting simply mean as long as it is supposed to last.** See Exodus 21:6; 1 Samuel 1:22,28; and Jude 7.

[BSG:] In the end, one of two eternities await us all. The lost, unfortunately, receive the “wages” they have earned—eternal death. [Romans 6:23] Why, then, is our only hope of not getting what we deserve, which is death, found in trusting in Jesus’ righteousness?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, June 27.‡

20. And when all sin, sinners, evil, death, and sickness are gone, what will be left?

[EGW:] There the wide-spreading plains swell into hills of beauty, and the mountains of God rear their lofty summits. On those peaceful plains, beside those living streams, God’s people, so long pilgrims and wanderers, shall find a home.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 675.1.‡

[EGW:] There, immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. There will be no cruel, deceiving foe to tempt to forgetfulness of God. Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to

admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body....

With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings. They share the treasures of knowledge and understanding gained through ages upon ages in contemplation of God's handiwork. With undimmed vision they gaze upon the glory of creation—suns and stars and systems, all in their appointed order circling the throne of Deity. Upon all things, from the least to the greatest, the Creator's name is written, and in all are the riches of His power displayed.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 677.2-678.0.‡

[EGW:] **The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more.** The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 678.3.†‡

[BSG:] Why do you think God has allowed sin to go on for so long? At the same time, no human being suffers in this world longer than their own existence here. That is, no one suffers more than his or her own lifetime. How short is a human lifetime compared to the thousands of years of sin? How might this perspective help us deal with the difficult question of evil?

How does the thousand-year period known as the millennium fit into the plan of salvation? Think about what it says about the character of God that—not until all of the redeemed will have had a chance to see the justice and fairness and love of God—will final judgment be brought upon the lost.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, June 28.‡

21. What should we have learned from this lesson?

[BSG:] God Himself will sustain and protect His people during the most brutal parts of the final battle of the great controversy.

The great controversy will end with God's victory over the devil, over evil and sin, and over suffering and death. This threefold victory is assured because it has already been secured by Christ through His death and resurrection.

We share in God's victory when we accept it by faith and allow the Holy Spirit to work it out in us.

God's victory will culminate in the second coming of Jesus, in the millennial judgment, and in the restoration of all things.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 171.†‡

22. What do we know about the close of probation?

[BSG:] The close of probation is a topic that often induces fear in many people. **Probation closes for each individual at his or her death.** That is, the window of opportunity for an individual to respond to God's grace has been closed by death. His or her attitude toward God's revealed grace will have eternal consequences. **God is righteous and will treat each individual's case**

according to the light that he or she received; but our individual response decisively matters.

However, Adventists understand from Scripture that, apart from the closing of probation at one's death, there will be a moment in the history of the great controversy when God will declare that the time when people can accept His forgiving grace in order to be saved has ended. That moment will be the point of no return, and no one will be saved beyond that time. The world then will live under the pronouncement recorded in the book of Revelation: " 'Let the one who does wrong still do wrong, and the one who is filthy still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous still practice righteousness, and the one who is holy still keep himself holy' " (*Rev. 22:11, NASB*). Truly concerned for their salvation, many Christians and Adventists ask such questions as: What if the moment of the close of probation will catch me off guard or unaware? What if I will not be completely ready at that moment?

At least two clarifications are necessary here.

First, the close of probation is real, and it will take place. **The deceptions, intrigues, and evils of the devil will not continue forever.** Sin, suffering, and death will not hold sway eternally. To eternalize the devil, evil, and death would mean that God is not a God of love and righteousness. But because He is, **He will put an end to the sources, and forces, of evil.** God has patiently waited and given every opportunity to humans to test His promises, to come to know Him, and to return to Him and to His kingdom of grace. How much God would have loved for all humanity to accept His gospel! **But there will be a moment when God must say, "Enough; it is finished."**

Second, God will not withdraw His gift of sustaining grace from His people, despite His withdrawal of mercy and forgiving grace to the unrepentant at the close of probation. This point is very important: **the end of probation does not imply that God's love and grace for humanity have reached their limits or that they have been consumed. God never ceases to be the God of love, grace, and righteousness portrayed in the Bible.** For this reason, there will be no one after probation closes who would have sincerely wanted to receive God's grace and who would have responded with faith to God's mercy to whom God would say, "Sorry, too late; I would love to have saved you, but the grace period is ended."

God's closure of probation will be His confirmation that every individual has made his or her final decision about His grace and His kingdom. At a future moment in history, the historical setting of the world will be such that all the inhabitants of the earth will make this final decision and will side with either God or Satan. However, that decision will not be made in the impulse of the moment. Rather, **each person's decision for eternity will be made based on his or her free choice and in full consciousness of its consequences.** Just as Northern Israel and Judah when they rejected God's covenant and Messiah, some will decide they do not want to be with the God of the Bible. Others will agree with Lucifer's lie that they are gods and immortal; they do not relish the idea of being with God in His kingdom. **God is saddened by these**

unalterable decisions; He provided all the evidence and love necessary to save them, but He will respect their final choice. Others, however, decide to accept God's grace because they love Him and want to stay with Him forever. On another note, the close of probation does not imply that, after that moment, God's faithful people will stand without His presence and grace and covering righteousness. Christ assured us that He will be with us " 'always, to the end of the age' " (*Matt. 28:20, NASB*). The empowerment of the Holy Spirit, which we will receive in order to give the loud cry, will not be removed from us. All God's people, from Adam and Abel to Abraham and Moses, from David and Isaiah to Paul and the last Christian sealed before probation closes, will be saved exclusively by Christ's righteousness and mediation, through faith. **Thus, the idea that some Christians at the end of time will stand on their own merit and power is not biblical.**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 171-173.†‡§

23. ***What does the Bible tell us about the "new heaven" and the "new earth"?***

[BSG:] Christians generally talk and sing about heaven as the place of their final destination and eternal rest. However, we must maintain the biblical understanding of heaven and guard against falling into pagan or philosophical views on Paradise. According to many worldviews—such as Greek, Hindu, or Buddhist philosophies—heaven is an alleged transcendent, timeless, and spaceless sphere that only a disembodied human mind or soul could reach. In Greek philosophy, the human mind that reaches heaven somehow keeps its identity and consciousness. In Hinduism, Buddhism, and Neoplatonism, the human consciousness that reaches heaven must disappear by dissolving into the universal consciousness.

As a result of the influence of classical Greek philosophy on traditional Christianity, most Christians now believe in the immortality of the soul and in a spiritual, as opposed to a material, heaven. These Christians do not realize that these philosophical concepts create irreconcilable contradictions in their theology and lives. On the one hand, when thinking about death and heaven, **traditional Christians think in Greek philosophical terms:** [they believe that] at death, the immortal soul goes to a transcendent, timeless, spaceless realm, called either hell or heaven. On the other hand, these same Christians believe in the exceedingly clear biblical teaching of the resurrection of the body. ***However, they do not realize that the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body are simply incompatible and generate a lot of inconsistencies.***

If our souls are immortal and are in heaven with God, why resurrect the body? Under such circumstances, the resurrection of the body would imply that the soul would leave the spiritual realm of heaven and re-enter the material, temporal, and spatial sphere. Even so, ***if only the soul is immortal, one must ask, Will the resurrection of the body be permanent? Will the body now also be eternal?***

The biblical teachings on human nature and the resurrection eliminate all these inconsistencies and problems. **First**, the biblical teaching of the unitary human

nature indicates that humans do not possess an immortal soul but are complex, indivisible, integrated living beings. At His return, Jesus will resurrect the whole human being. **Second**, the biblical teaching of the nature of humanity rejects Greek dualism and its concept that heaven is a transcendent, timeless, spaceless, divine sphere.

According to the Bible, at death our being is not divided. We do not survive as an ethereal soul, and that soul does not transition, fully conscious, to a state of transcendence beyond the created universe. When we die, our entire being dies. However, when Christ returns, He will resurrect our entire being and welcome us into His real, historical, temporal, and spatial kingdom. Yes, at the second coming of Christ, we will travel with Him to the throne of God, to the heavenly sanctuary, somewhere in the center of the universe. But that travel will take place in the temporal and spatial universe, meaning we will be traveling in space and time. We will never go beyond the universe. In fact, no created being will ever be transcendent because only God is transcendent or beyond the created universe. To want to reach the transcendent is to want to be God.

The millennial judgment in heaven will also be a historical event that will take place in space and time in God's heavenly sanctuary before His throne, which is also located in a central place in the universe. After that judgment, we will return to earth. Following God's executive judgment against the devil and the rest of the rebels, God will restore our planet to its original beauty and perfection. **The new earth will be our home.** There we will live as we were originally intended to live before the Fall: smelling flowers, cultivating a garden, studying a leaf, playing with a lion, meeting and interacting with redeemed of all ages, as well as with angels and other created beings. Most important, we will enjoy the privilege of face-to-face communion with God; we will worship Him in person. The earth and the universe will be reconciled and will be brought back to the harmony and unity that existed before the Fall. We will be able to travel freely throughout the universe. The reason we cannot travel to heaven now is not because of constraints or barriers of time, space, substance, or speed, but sin. When the great controversy finally is over and sin is removed once and for all, the new (renewed) earth will be integrated with heaven, and then will be realized that most precious of Bible promises: a new earth and a new heaven.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 173-174.†‡§

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